



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1376.0 - Local Government and ABS (Newsletter), Jun 2003

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Local Government and ABS is a quarterly newsletter created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) aimed at helping the Local Government Sector use statistics to assist with planning and other community servicing decisions.

A specific aim of this newsletter is to help you easily find information on the ABS website. It explains the structure of the ABS website and provides direct electronic links to statistical series of use to local government. Electronic links are written in blue and underlined and can be activated using the mouse button. Statistical terms are also explained to help make sense of more complex data.

Local Government and ABS provides a central contact point where you can provide your views and suggestions as to how the ABS can better assist Local Government.

We encourage you to forward this newsletter to others and post it on your bulletin board. Anyone is welcome to receive Local Government and ABS. To subscribe, just send an email to [jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au](mailto:jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au) with "subscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line. If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter please unsubscribe by sending an email to [jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au](mailto:jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au) with "unsubscribe Local Government and ABS" in the subject line.

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### Submissions invited on 2006 Census topics

The publication, 2006 Census of Population and Housing: ABS Views on Content and Procedures (2007.0) to be released on 2 July 2003, is the first in a series of Information Papers designed to initiate public consultation on the content and procedures of the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. The next census is expected to be held on Tuesday 8 August 2006.

The Information Paper describes:

- the procedures for the 2006 Census;
- the topics that might be included; and
- explains ABS arrangements to protect the privacy of individuals and the confidentiality of the information supplied by them.

Users of census data and interested members of the public will be invited to make submissions on any aspect of the conduct and content of the census, using the assessment criteria outlined in the Information Paper.

The information Paper will be made available on the ABS website at [www.abs.gov.au/census](http://www.abs.gov.au/census). Submissions can be made electronically by email or in hardcopy. Submissions will close on 30 July, 2003.

Following assessment of submissions and consultation meetings, recommendations on the nature and content of the 2006 Census will be discussed with the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) later in 2003. All individuals or organisations who have made submissions will be advised of the results of these deliberations. The ABS will prepare a submission to the Federal Government during 2004 containing recommendations on the nature and content of the 2006 Census and release an Information Paper outlining the final 2006 Census content.

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## Regional Statistics Program

A primary objective of the Regional Statistics Program in the ABS is to improve the breadth and quality of small area data available for policy assessment, decision makers and community use. Part of this objective is achieved by ensuring that such data are highly visible and readily accessible to users. While a range of regional and small area data are available on the ABS website, finding them is not particularly easy.

This is all about to change! A working group has been established which will work toward improving the visibility and coherence of regional data on the ABS website. It is anticipated that features such as a regional statistics icon to access regional data directly from the ABS home page will be added.

In addition, work is commencing on a National Regional Profile (NRP). This profile will contain a suite of indicators available for small areas within Australia. The NRP should enable the quantitative measurement, evaluation and comparison of the performance of regions to occur at a broad level. Initially the NRP will contain indicators that are readily available such as population and other demographic variables, some headline type economic indicators and, where possible, a selection of social and environmental data items. It is anticipated that, over time, this suite of indicators will grow. The NRP will be available from the website, initially in a fixed format report, with the area of choice being selected using drill-down maps. The current target date for the NRP being available is early 2004.

## Contact

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## How do I find data for areas smaller than States?

The publication catalogue number found in the **catalogue of publications** is a useful indicator of whether small area data may be available. The fifth digit after the full stop represents the State or Territory covered by the statistics. The code for Australia is '0' and the smallest level that these publications tend to provide is Total State or Section of State. Those publications with a number greater than '0' may have small area data available. The codes for each State and Territory are:

- 1 New South Wales
- 2 Victoria
- 3 Queensland
- 4 South Australia
- 5 Western Australia
- 6 Tasmania
- 7 Northern Territory
- 8 Australian Capital Territory
- 9 External Territories

The rule of thumb is the larger the sample size of the collection, the finer the level that data are available. For surveys with small samples, the reliability of data is reduced because of sampling variability. The ABS has a commitment to produce quality data and will only release data which satisfies this commitment. Accordingly, small area data are usually unavailable from survey type collections.

Census information is collected from all people or businesses within scope of a collection. Data is usually available for small areas for census collections unless the release of this information could identify an individual.

Estimated Resident Populations are available for Local Government Areas. Similarly information is collected from all Councils regarding Local Government Finance and Building Approvals.

The largest range of regional data is published in regional publications providing a range of data for Local Government Areas. Included is data from the Australian Taxation Office, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. This information can also be accessed from the themes section of the website, **Regional Statistics Units** and View selected data items available across Australia.

Finally if you're not sure if information is available at the geographic level that you require you can contact the ABS National Information and Referral Service by telephoning **1300 135 070**. This type of request is free. Due to the complexity and range of data, the ABS can often answer your questions better over the phone. Many questions are able to be answered straight away while some will be referred to other ABS staff who will contact you.

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## How can I see what's in a publication?

You can view ABS publications at a number of libraries across Australia. The ABS Library Extension Program (LEP) offers all Australians free access to ABS information through a network of participating libraries including rural and remote locations.

LEP member libraries receive selected paper and electronic titles. Many libraries also have access to the electronic Library Extension Program (eLEP) service which provides free on-line access to all ABS publications from 1998 in Adobe Acrobat format (.pdf). Over 650 full text publication titles are available on the ABS web site through this service. The service is available in participating LEP libraries and offers library users around Australia access to the latest ABS statistics at their local library. Details of ABS information available are provided in the entry for each **Library connected to the LEP**.

Under copyright law you may not reproduce more than 10% of a publication without purchasing that publication.

You can also of course contact the ABS National Information and Referral Service by telephoning **1300 135 070** to verify what data are included in a publication.

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## How do I purchase ABS data?

After viewing a publication you may want to purchase it. Instructions of the various options available to **purchase products** are available on the website . Alternatively ABS publications can be sent to you every time they are released, by post or email by using the **ABS Subscription Service**.

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## Statistical terms and what they mean

".....Lies, damned lies and statistics" is a common response to fact based information. However misinterpretation is the predominant problem in the use of statistical information. Misrepresentation or misinterpretation of data may be caused by a number of factors such as not understanding or ignoring definitions; comparing statistics inappropriately; or not recognising quality issues of the data.

**Statistics - A Powerful Edge** is a free publication which can be accessed from the ABS website in easy to read sections or downloaded as a pdf file. It has been designed to assist users of statistics:

- to improve confidence in using statistical information;
- to be more critical of information that is presented to them;
- to increase the appreciation of statistics in modern society;
- to compare and analyse data relevant to Australia following methods outlined in the text.

Statistical terms such as mean, median, standard error etc are explained with examples providing a general understanding of statistics.

If you want to improve your knowledge of how to interpret statistics, this is a good starting point.

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## What's happening in Local Government Finance

During the months of April/May/June staff from the ABS Local Government Statistics Unit visited each state government agency with responsibility for local government. (A visit to the Northern Territory Dept of Local Government is scheduled for later in the calendar year.) The visits were undertaken to further the co-operative approach in gathering financial data from councils. The intention is that councils supply annual financial data to both the state/territory local government agency and the ABS at the one time, by way of a combined collection instrument.

The ABS has an interest in producing statistics which are classified according to a standard, widely understood set of classifications. Clearly this would aid industry-wide comparison by placing all councils on a common basis. At the same time requirements unique to a particular state need to be catered for. A further important consideration is the need to simplify statistical reporting for the councils themselves. Discussions of this type are instrumental in ensuring that the needs of state agencies, the ABS and councils are met, as far as possible.

As well as being involved in the provision of data annually, a number of councils and local government corporations provide data to the ABS on a quarterly basis. Some of these councils were also visited. Financial staff were interviewed and comments were received on the effectiveness and clarity of the quarterly collection form currently in use. Many helpful suggestions were received and these will be considered for incorporating into future versions of the quarterly questionnaire.

As discussed in our previous Newsletter, the Local Government Purpose Classification (LGPC) has been designed as a function-based classification closely suited to the activities of local government. It is intended that the LGPC gain wide acceptance throughout the sector thus supporting the ABS' stated aim of greater standardisation of local government statistics for comparability purposes. As part of the ABS' consultation process the classification has been made available in draft form to a number of key users within the local government community. Responses are now awaited so that the classification can be finalised and made available for general application. (Further information about the LGPC and the consultation process leading up to it's introduction can be obtained from the contacts listed below.)

The Local Government Statistics Unit has within it's charter an aim of making information available at an individual council level. Some information is already available through **Regional Statistics Units**. Intending users of ABS local government finance data are encouraged to contact the ABS' National Information and Referral Service in the first instance. These personnel will be able to coordinate a response outlining what data are available and the applicable pricing structure. Telephone number is **1300 135 070**.

## Contacts

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## Link to the previous edition of Local Government and ABS

**Local Government and ABS Edition 1 March 2003**

## Newsletter contact details

This newsletter is one way to help improve communication between the ABS and the Local Government Sector. New ABS initiatives to assist Local Government organisations will be announced in this newsletter as they evolve. We would like your views and suggestions about this newsletter so that it remains useful and assists you to understand and use ABS statistics. Please email comments to the Local Government Sector Account Manager, [jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au](mailto:jeff.bulger@abs.gov.au) or telephone (08) 82377621

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